

[the Seven People you Meet in Elysium](#) by [Luddleston](#)

Category: Hades (Video Game 2018)

Genre: Banter, Established PZA, Established Relationship, Extra-Canonical Characters, F/M, Flirting, Fluff, Friendship, Genderfluid Achilles, Identity Porn, M/M, Meeting the Parents, Multi

Language: English

Characters: Achilles (Hades Video Game), Patroclus (Hades Video Game), Zagreus (Hades Video Game)

Relationships: Achilles/Patroclus (Hades Video Game), Achilles/Patroclus/Zagreus (Hades Video Game)

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-10-24

Updated: 2021-10-24

Packaged: 2022-12-19 10:50:23

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 12,003

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Zagreus begins to explore more of the Underworld, especially Elysium, where he meets various shades who all somehow seem to be related to Achilles and Patroclus. Some are lovers, some are family, some are people they've killed and are remarkably relaxed about that fact.

And one is somebody he's known all along.

the Seven People you Meet in Elysium

Author's Note:

when you give a Luddles the Iliad..... this happens.

(This isn't supposed to be accurate or anything it's just me sticking random Iliad characters into Hadesgame universe)

See end notes for specific shades he meets and fun facts, I don't wanna spoil who everybody is!

— One —

It wasn't long after Achilles and Patroclus' reunion that other shades in Elysium started to approach Zagreus, just for friendly conversation or to get to know who he was. His work these days was more involved with the people, too, keeping peace in the realm and helping with day to day problems that might turn into security threats later, rather than waiting for holes in the Underworld's defenses to develop.

Zagreus didn't realize how lonely he'd been at the House until he had more friends than he could count on both hands, and was enjoying this development more than he could say. Sometimes, the shades had problems he could help with, lovers and family and friends he could reunite them with as he'd done with Achilles and Patroclus. Those moments made him feel more like he was making a difference down here than any battle with his father ever had.

This was why, when he came to a chamber in Elysium with a lone warrior, he was not surprised to see it was somebody he'd never met before.

He was taller than Zagreus but some shades were—a lot of shades were, in fact. This one was dressed not in a standard Exalted's armor but in his own style, although it did bear enough flashy, bright shades to clearly be of Elysium. He held a sword, a wickedly curved blade, and a massive shield

even larger than Aegis, and he was grinning at Zagreus despite pointing a weapon in his direction.

He was handsome, too—dark skin and white hair tied back in a bun, bright blue eyes and enough of a beard to be noticeable but not enough to hide the sharpness of his jawline.

"Well met, my prince!" he called, his voice jovial and loud, a little higher than the deep boom Zagreus had been expecting based on the man's stature. "I was told this was where to come if I wanted to meet you for a spar, for Theseus does not give up his spotlight willingly."

The proposition of a spar and the subtle dig at Theseus both had Zagreus immediately endeared to this man. "Indeed it is, my good shade," he said. "I would absolutely be willing to take on your challenge."

"Fantastic," he said with a flash of a grin, dropping into stance.

Zagreus called Stygius to his side, feeling the energy of his blade sing in harmony with the energy of his blood. He'd been through enough fights on this particular excursion that he'd picked up a couple of boons, most notably Aphrodite and Artemis' touches on his blade, and his uncle's lightning coursing through his bloodstones.

"May I have your name before we fight?" he asked the warrior. "It seems only polite, given that you already know mine."

"That is true! Forgive my lack of manners, I'm excited." He gave Zagreus a short, playful bow. "My name is Sarpedon, formerly of Lycia. I'm not sure if down here it is as customary for soldiers to recite their lineage before battle as the poets seem to think it is above, but I would rather not."

"You want to cut to the chase?"

"Sure. And I want to keep some mystery about me," Sarpedon said, mischief sparkling in his blue eyes. Zagreus noted that it was only the hair kept longer at the top of his head that was white, the sides of it were cut

only a little longer than Ares', and were dark like his brows and his beard. It was a striking effect.

Zagreus was glad at first to have brought Stygius, for meeting this man blade against blade was a thrill, but he soon found that it was difficult to get past Sarpedon's guard. His supernovas hit, although Sarpedon seemed to shrug them off even when Artemis' boon made them more painful. But any ordinary attacks were fended easily with a simple sweep of his shield.

"I'm going to need you to teach me how to do that!" Zagreus laughed as Sarpedon parried his attack and then counterattacked with his shield, bashing Zagreus back a few paces. The combination of Aegis and Stygius would probably be brilliant.

"Come closer, I'll show you again," Sarpedon taunted him.

Zagreus did not come closer, having decided that his sword was not going to be as much use against Sarpedon as something with a bit more range. He shot one of his bloodstones in Sarpedon's direction in a glorious shower of sparks, and heard a gasp from him, which he hoped was a sign of a hit.

Except.

The lightning flashed through Sarpedon's body as it ought to, but then it continued coursing through him, collecting at his core. He cackled and *slammed* his shield into the ground, a field of sparks flying up so rapidly that Zagreus didn't have a chance to dodge before being knocked back.

Electricity painfully struck him down, the same force as Theseus calling upon Lord Zeus' power to attempt to save his sorry ass from Zagreus' weapon of choice. The shock left him open—he'd been jolted, Sarpedon had reflected the power of all Zeus' boons back at Zagreus—and before he could recover, Sarpedon's blade was at his neck.

His only option for a win would have been another bloodstone, except that wouldn't work at all.

Well, it wasn't like one hit was going to kill him. Permanently.

"I hear you fight to the death in the arena," Sarpedon said, "although the Minotaur tells me he yields rather than allowing you to kill him here." He'd planted his sandal firmly on Zagreus' chest to keep him from struggling upward and raising Stygius against him again. "But you don't do the same, do you?"

"No. I don't yield," Zagreus said, pushing against the force keeping him pinned despite knowing he couldn't free himself.

"If I kill you, you absolutely must promise to come back and fight me again."

"I swear it."

"Good!" This was accompanied by a powerful sweep of his sword, and even when Zagreus rolled, it caught him in his shoulder and down his collarbone, his mortal-red blood soaking the field.

It was a *good* hit, a deep enough cut to kill him, but in this case, it just prompted his death defiance to kick in. A shockwave of energy pushed Sarpedon back just a little as it knitted together Zagreus' wounds, putting him back on his feet with a burst of pain and then a cool wash of healing.

"There we go." He shook his head to clear any lingering ache and engaged again, sword only. He wasn't making the mistake of using the bloodstones again.

"*You'll* have to teach *me* that one," Sarpedon said, finally sounding winded by Zagreus' assault. Zagreus had the endurance to wear him down, and eventually one of Sarpedon's parries just wasn't fast enough.

Zagreus, unfortunately, took a blow for a blow, managing a strike on Sarpedon but getting the shield crushed into his ribs for his troubles. It didn't do quite as much damage as it had the last time he'd been bashed with it, Aphrodite's power sowing weakness in Sarpedon's muscles.

"I can't convince you to call down lightning again, can I?" Sarpedon asked, and Zagreus laughed and shook his head, dashing behind Sarpedon and

managing another hit, this time without taking one in return.

"You cannot!" Fortunately, lightning was not the last of the tricks Zagreus had up his sleeve, and fortunately, Sarpedon had let slip that it was the lightning itself that allowed him to reflect the bloodstone, and not the fact that it was a ranged weapon.

"*Artemis!*" he called, releasing the power that had built up within him with every strike against Sarpedon.

A green arrow zipped through the chamber, her aim true, straight into Sarpedon's middle. Sarpedon dropped to one knee—not bleeding, shades had no blood, but wounded enough that he could not go on.

He was still laughing, even as he clutched at his injured side, waiting for the pain to abate. It healed quickly, for all Zagreus knew. Asterius was never completely healed but more or less whole when Zagreus encountered him at the arena after besting him within Elysium's chambers.

"I do yield, in case you were planning to dispatch me," Sarpedon said, although Zagreus had not wondered otherwise, considering how Sarpedon had fallen to his knees and dropped his weapons.

"No, good sir, I may not yield but I would always allow another to." He flopped into the grass beside Sarpedon. "How in the *world* did you do that thing with the lightning?"

Sarpedon chuckled, taking his hand away from his wound, which was already healing. He unbuckled his breastplate to allow himself to sit in a more comfortable hunch, which revealed an enormous scar like a starburst in the middle of his chest. "That is my secret, Prince Zagreus," he said. "I am a son of Zeus, and his power does not hurt me."

"Oh!" Zagreus perked up, cheer blossoming in his chest. "We're cousins!"

"Indeed!"

"We ought to get to know each other, then," Zagreus said, tugging a bottle of nectar out of his rather considerable stash and offering it to share, since it seemed to be that sort of occasion. "I wasn't aware I had mortal cousins. What was your life like, on the surface?"

If he seemed over-eager, it didn't bother Sarpedon. He just reached over and tousled Zagreus' hair like they'd known one another for years. "Of course you have mortal cousins, my father is a philanderer."

"Well, I knew he wasn't exactly loyal to his wife," Zagreus said, aware that Artemis and Ares and Hermes and Dionysus all had different mothers. "I guess I just thought he mostly fooled around with gods."

"The opposite, actually. For every goddess he's had some kind of offspring with, he's had a dozen mortal children." Sarpedon shook his head, gratefully taking the bottle of nectar from Zagreus. After a drink, he continued. "As you can imagine based on that, I didn't see him often, just once as a child and once as a young man, before I left to fight at Troy."

"You fought at Troy?"

"I did, indeed." He tugged the shoulder of his chiton aside to further display his scar. "Died there, too. The best of the myrmidons got me, so I can't be too pissed off about it."

"Patroclus?" It was not the first time Zagreus had heard his lover referred to in such a way. 'Best of the myrmidons' indeed, and among the best of all mortal men, if you asked Zagreus.

"Yes," Sarpedon confirmed, "now that was an incredible fight. A lot less magical weaponry, though. Let me see that sword of yours."

"I know him well, you know," Zagreus said, obligingly passing Stygius over and allowing Sarpedon to examine the infernal weapon. "Patroclus, I mean."

"I know him well, too, nowadays." He tested the balance of the blade and frowned, probably finding it lacking for his particular build.

"Do you?" Zagreus had always wondered about the relationships between dead men and those who had killed them.

Sarpedon passed him his blade and another smile. "Death has a way of bringing people together, I suppose. He is just as good in bed as he is on the battlefield, yes?"

Zagreus spluttered and fumbled his sword. "I. Uh. Well. Yes. That. He is, that."

Sarpedon only laughed again, giving him a clap on the shoulder that truly did remind Zagreus of his uncle Zeus.

— ? —

There were more markets in Elysium than just the one near the arena, flooded with goods from Charon and the shades alike. Zagreus liked exploring them, and had come enough times that the shades stopped turning their heads when he wandered through, having grown used to the sight of his flaming laurels and his chthonic armor.

Sometimes the market was crowded, as today, and Zagreus became a little overwhelmed by the press of people, ghostly bodies able to crowd pack together because they could overlap a little without distress. He pushed his way through, trying to escape, looking over his shoulder for any gaps in the crowd.

And then he collided with somebody hard enough to send them sprawling.

He whirled around with an apology already on his lips. "I'm so sorry, I wasn't looking—!"

It was a young woman, dressed like a princess, beautiful jewelry and a gown dyed with rich, deep colors. She was golden-haired and olive-skinned, and the lightest hints of a flush were spreading across her cheeks under the circles and lines of decorative makeup on her face, likely embarrassment because Zagreus had just knocked her over.

"Truly sorry, my lady." He crouched to help her up, and then found that, once standing, she was even taller than he was. She looked a bit younger than him, and though she was very effeminately graceful, her hands were wider and her shoulders a little broader than expected, almost like Megaera.

"It's no trouble," she said, ducking her chin, her voice soft. "I simply didn't expect..."

"Nor did I! It's a pleasure to meet you though, anyway, please tell me if I have made you drop anything."

"I am fine." She was holding a small basket, which was covered by a cloth that had been jostled somewhat. As she tugged it free to replace it properly again, Zagreus caught sight of a batch of little cakes, like the ones Patroclus liked, soaked in nectar. Patroclus said that on the surface they did a similar thing with honey. Zagreus had no idea what honey was and their explanation did not make him want to try it.

Achilles didn't like them, always said they were too sweet even for his sweet tooth, but he picked up a few of them for Patroclus every time he was in town. "Oh, is the bakery still open?" Zagreus asked, wondering if he might do the same. "I have a companion who loves those, I thought to get a few for him."

There was a little twist of a smile on her face, as if she was amused by the idea. Maybe she was doing the same. "I believe it is," she said.

"Thank you! And, seriously—sorry for running over you."

"It's no trouble," she repeated, stepping onward into the crowd before Zagreus could make further amends.

When Zagreus arrived at Achilles and Patroclus' home after stopping by the bakery, there was already a plate of cakes on the table. Achilles must have been there before him, Zagreus supposed. He set his own parcel beside those, but not before stuffing one in his mouth. It wasn't like Patroclus could eat twelve of them himself.

He missed Patroclus stepping into the room but heard him shout as soon as he entered. "Achilles!" Patroclus called, "I've found a thief in our kitchen!"

Zagreus found himself wishing he hadn't tried eating that cake in one bite. "M notta thief!" Zagreus mumbled, repeating himself with more clarity once he'd swallowed. "I bought these ones, I'm not a thief."

"Hmm, I'm not certain I believe you," Patroclus said, sweeping him into his arms and kissing the sticky-sweet nectar off his lips.

Zagreus kissed him back, trying not to get any lingering sticky glaze in Patroclus' hair, until he was distracted by Achilles exiting the bedroom completely nude.

"What's this about a thief?" he asked, leaning unselfconsciously in the doorway. His hair was tied into a braid, which was unusual, but the smile on his lips at the sight of Zagreus was not. He looked perhaps a little flustered—Patroclus must have been treating him well before Zagreus arrived.

"Zagreus is stealing my dessert," Patroclus said, leaning away and giving Zagreus enough space to wipe his hands on the cloth that had been covering the cakes.

"You have plenty," Achilles said. "Although it was rather impolite of you not to ask, lad."

"Ah, no, however will you punish me?" Zagreus asked, entirely teasing, laughing through it. Patroclus was herding him toward the bedroom, along with Achilles, and he dropped his cloak on a pile of other clothing while Zagreus kissed Achilles in the doorway.

"Achilles, love, you've got something here." Patroclus thumbed a little smudge of what looked like red paint off Achilles' cheek. "And you," he said to Zagreus, reaching out and tapping a spot at the corner of his mouth, "have got something right here."

"What have I got?" Zagreus asked. Certainly not any crumbs or glaze from the cake, Patroclus had ensured that much.

"This," Achilles said, kissing him again, right at the spot Patroclus had indicated.

Zagreus laughed against his mouth.

— Two & Three —

Zagreus was in his deepest concentration when he was either fighting or fishing, which meant he did not notice somebody approaching him on the banks of the Lethe until he heard a polite clearing of a throat followed by, "is anything biting, there?"

He turned his head to find a shade he did not recognize, a man dressed in a stylish way (as far as Zagreus could tell), with a lot of jewelry and gold accents. Shades could choose the age they appeared to be, and sometimes changed from one to another (Achilles, for one, had gotten much younger-looking after being reunited with Patroclus) but this man chose to appear as middle aged, silver at his temples and peppered through his beard. Aside from this, his hair was long and dark, falling all the way to his waist, unbound and perfectly straight.

He was handsome, impressively so, handsome enough that Zagreus forgot his words upon seeing him.

"Oh. Um. Not yet, sir!" he said, once he remembered he'd been addressed.

"I wonder, what is it that you can catch here?" the man asked, seating himself close to Zagreus. On his brow, he wore a well-crafted circlet with enough gems in it to rival the ones Nyx wore sometimes. He looked like royalty, and Zagreus was surprised at how easily and willingly he plopped onto the ground beside him.

"Lots of things!" Zagreus said. "Although, I'm told they're very different from the fishes of the surface, so I don't think giving you the names of the species would help."

"Quite. I can't say I know anything about fishing, despite once living on the coast." He looked out at the river, and at Zagreus' line, which was not luring

much of anything at all. "You are the prince of the Underworld, correct? The son of Hades?"

"Indeed, sir."

"There's no need to address me as such, *you're* the prince," he said, waving off Zagreus' formalities.

"Well, then instead you must give me your name," Zagreus said.

When he smiled, the corners of his eyes wrinkled, and he looked rather lovely. "It's Peleus," he said. "Of course, you need no introduction, Prince Zagreus."

"I need enough introduction to tell you 'it's just Zagreus'," he corrected gently.

"Zagreus, then," Peleus said. "Tell me, do you often come to Elysium for these sorts of... fishing trips?"

Zagreus, content that he was going to catch nothing, pulled in his line. "More often I come here for work, or to see people I know," he said. He'd actually just come from Achilles and Patroclus' home. "I'm not trespassing on your particular bit of the river, am I?"

Peleus only laughed. "No, you aren't. My home is up there, yes, but the river doesn't belong to anybody." He was pointing out a solitary residence up on a hill, not palatial by any means but not like the warrens of dwellings crowded together in Asphodel, tight quarters getting tighter because of flooding.

"It's a nice place, sir—Peleus. Sorry. Is it much like your home on the surface was?"

"Not particularly," Peleus said. "But I do not mind that. My home on the surface required my utmost attention at all times." He drew a hand through his hair, revealing a pair of earrings that stood out bright gold against the black and silver. "It is much quieter, here. In my younger days I was used to

my son running through the house, causing all sorts of mayhem." He spoke about it with a wistfulness in his eyes. Zagreus sort of wished his own father had responded like this to his mayhem, rather than trying to squash any attempt at stepping out of line.

"It sounds like you were a good father," he said.

"I tried to be. But I can't be sure I was successful. How could I have been a good father if my son went to Hades before I did?" His hand curled into a fist over his knee, where there was a massive scar. Maybe he had been a warrior in life.

Zagreus placed his hand over Peleus', trying to instill some calm in him. "Mortals bear little control over when and how they join us here. The only guarantee is that you someday will." His words were a bit stilted, he was quoting Thanatos. "Can you see your son down here? Perhaps I could get a message to him?"

Peleus laughed again but it sounded a bit teary. "Thank you, Zagreus, but a prince has no place playing courier for a shade. Anyway, for a long time I could not see him. But recently we were reunited, and I thank the gods for it." His warm brown eyes met Zagreus' as he spoke, as if he was thanking him personally.

"I'm glad to hear it," Zagreus said. He kept his hand on Peleus', reaching out with his free one to tuck a loose strand of Peleus' hair behind his ear. They were a little pointed—he must have had some nymph blood in him. A lot of shades in Elysium did. It lent a roguishness to his appearance, which otherwise would have been quite austere. "These sorts of things, families, reunions, they're sort of my specialty."

"That is your domain?" Peleus asked.

"Oh, I don't know about that! I still don't really think I *have* a domain. I'm not particularly special, I'm just me."

Peleus turned his hand over to take Zagreus', laying his opposite on top. "You're selling yourself short a bit there, Zagreus. Families and reunions are

important things. Precious things. If you take care of them as a god, you are a great blessing on all the mortal souls in your care."

Zagreus could feel himself flushing. "Thank you. I... I don't really know if I see it that way yet."

"I hope that someday you will." He squeezed Zagreus' hand, and Zagreus found himself doing that thing he did—tilting his head, lowering his eyes—the way he looked when he wanted to be kissed.

Peleus did not take this as an invitation, and instead his head lifted as he spotted another shade approaching them, and he called out a greeting. "Phoenix! Have you met the prince yet, love?"

The other shade—Phoenix—looked to be about the same age as Peleus, perhaps a little younger. His hair was fiery red and fell in a tumble of curls, a little looser than Achilles', thin strands of it flying away. He set a hand on Peleus' shoulder as he approached, a comfortable touch for them, Zagreus noted.

"I have not had the pleasure," Phoenix said. "Forgive me for being so forthright immediately after meeting you, Prince, but I must ask—Peleus, are you aware this man is looking at you as if he wants to jump your spectral bones?"

Peleus' eyes went wide. "I... no, well. Truly?"

"I'm sorry!" Zagreus said, drawing his hand back. "I didn't realize—not many people down here are in entirely exclusive relationships."

"Oh, we're not." Phoenix sat beside Peleus and kissed his cheek. "I just wanted to make him aware. Trust me, lad, I flirted with him for twenty years and he did not notice."

Peleus rolled his eyes and made an exasperated sigh, as if this was a subject on which Phoenix often teased him.

"More importantly," Phoenix continued, putting an arm around his lover, "Prince Zagreus, you ought to know this man is Peleus, former King of Phthia, Achilles' father. And if the rumors are correct, that's a boundary you might not be interested in trespassing."

"*Oh!*" Achilles' *father*. Wow. Okay. Now that Zagreus looked at him with that in mind, the resemblance was a bit clearer. They had the same shape to their eyes and their brows, and he'd bet that if Peleus was clean-shaven, he would have an identical jawline and mouth, too. "Well, that is correct, actually, I would prefer not to—I mean, *I* would feel immensely uncomfortable if one of my lovers was interested in *my* father, and that's not just because he's an awful prick."

"Achilles *is* your lover, then?" Peleus asked.

"He didn't tell you?"

Phoenix shrugged. "He's being coy. He said he was your mentor and that you were very dear to him, and then I asked if he was fucking you, and all he did was turn red."

"Probably because you put it so rudely," Peleus scolded him.

"No, I think it was actually because you preceded that by likening it to his relationship with Chiron, and so that formed quite an uncomfortable comparison." Phoenix sighed, letting Peleus lean more fully into him. "Anyhow, the last time Achilles and I shared a lover—his fault, not mine, I might add—did not go so well. Almost comically ridiculous. He was in a snit over it."

"This... has happened before?" Zagreus asked.

"Listen, there were only so many men at Troy and the two of them are luses," Phoenix said, referring to Achilles and Patroclus both, probably.

"So are you," Peleus remarked.

"Exactly, a terrible combination. Anyway, his own fault for sleeping with his charioteer. A beginner mistake."

"Weren't you supposed to be there to keep him from making beginner mistakes?" Peleus asked.

"No, you see, my dearest, that is how you learn."

Watching the two of them banter back and forth actually reminded Zagreus immensely of Achilles and Patroclus themselves. He could see little mannerisms, especially the way Peleus leaned on his lover, which mimicked Achilles' exactly. Or the other way around, rather. Achilles had learned how to love by watching his father with this man.

"Anyway, Prince Zagreus, we ought not to be keeping you here while we bicker," Peleus said diplomatically.

"I don't mind it, sir," Zagreus said, although he did get to his feet. They did as well, to send him off. "Also, I've told you, it's Zagreus."

"And I've told *you* there's no need to call me 'sir'," he replied. "Do you address Achilles in such a way?"

"I used to, out of respect for my mentor," Zagreus said, brushing his chiton free of any grass clinging to the fabric. Because they seemed like they appreciated a bawdier sense of humor, he tacked on, "now I only call him that in bed."

As predicted, both of them laughed, Phoenix patting him on the shoulder in a comradely show of affection.

"Stop by again sometime," Peleus told him, warmly grasping his hand. "Bring Achilles with you. I can't normally embarrass him in front of his lover because Patroclus has known him since he was so young."

"I look forward to it," Zagreus said.

He couldn't help his blush at the kiss Phoenix pressed to his cheek, even if it left Phoenix absolutely roaring with laughter at Zagreus' flustered response.

Zagreus was pretty sure he'd just discovered where much of Patroclus' sensibilities came from, as well.

— ? —

After his pleasant but slightly embarrassing meeting with Achilles' father (fathers?) Zagreus headed for the arena, not to fight, but because he'd made a friend in Sarpedon, who was currently trying to challenge the champions.

Whenever Theseus and Asterius fought, there was a crowd around the arena, and Zagreus was not taking the quick way in through the contestants' entrance. It took a lot of organizing to get all the spectators through the doors and into their seats, which meant quite some time spent in a queue. Zagreus always kept an eye out for his supportive shade whenever he came, but it seemed they truly were quite loyal and only appeared when Zagreus fought.

He did not recognize the red shade among the crowd but he did spot somebody familiar.

It was the young woman he'd run into in the market, wearing a different but equally lovely dress in shades of white and green, most of her jewelry the same but one of her earrings swapped out, her face painted in even bolder patterns than last time. The make-up was distracting but it was undeniable how pretty she was beneath it.

Somebody joined her side, putting an arm around her. He was wearing a cloak with a hood, but Zagreus recognized Patroclus from the way he stood and from the shape of his hands.

How strange.

The way he held her was affectionate, and he leaned in to whisper his thoughts in her ear rather than speaking them aloud. He didn't get close enough to smudge any of her make-up but his hand slid from her back to her hip, making it clear that this affection was more than just friendly.

Of course Zagreus knew better than most that Achilles and Patroclus' relationship was not exclusive in any way, but he didn't know that either of them had a lover they didn't share. He supposed he wasn't exactly surprised Patroclus had a female lover, more just...

He was surprised Patroclus had a *type*.

Although Zagreus supposed he didn't suit that type—tall, slender, and blond-haired—nor did Sarpedon, who, if his boasting was to be believed, was also Patroclus' lover. But maybe he preferred women who closely resembled Achilles, for some reason. Or perhaps he just had many lovers and it was pure coincidence that two of them were blond.

Zagreus was seated too far away from them to observe further, but he swore that right before they walked through the gates, Patroclus looked over and gave him a smug grin.

— Four & Five —

It was not often that Zagreus got truly lost in Elysium.

If he followed the Lethe, he would reach the arena and then the gates to the Temple of Styx. Patroclus and Achilles' home was along the river, as were the markets, and Peleus and Phoenix's home, which he'd been to on a few occasions now. But Zagreus was nothing if not eager to explore, and so he ventured further and further from the river, and eventually landed himself in a place he did not recognize.

It was a residential area, a lot of small houses all connected to one another and arranged around a central courtyard that featured a beautiful garden and a fountain not unlike the ones Zagreus had installed along the river's path to assist him on his way out of the House. It was quite a lovely fountain, featuring an enormous sculpture of a surface animal that slightly resembled Asterius (which Zagreus had been told was called a horse, when he described one to Patroclus.)

There was a shade sitting by the fountain, on a bench underneath a tree, with a book in his hands. He was an aged man with a full head of gray and a

silver beard to match, freckles all across his shoulders and his arms, probably his face, too, but it was hard to distinguish his features with his nose in his book like that.

"Hello there," Zagreus called, his walk turning into a bit of a trot so he could approach the man. "I'm sorry to interrupt your morning or afternoon here, but do you mind telling me where exactly I am?"

He did not close the book, but turned it upside down on his lap so that he did not lose his place, giving Zagreus a curious look. His face was indeed freckled, and quite distinctly lined, particularly around his brows, as if he had often furrowed them in life. There were also deep lines beneath his eyes like Thanatos had, which made him look a bit weary, but his voice was light, soft, and his way of speaking was easy.

"Hail, traveler," he said. "You're a long way from Tartarus."

"Yes sir, I am! I'm Zagreus. I've been exploring a bit around Elysium and I have gotten myself quite lost, actually."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Zagreus. I hear tell that you are quite something in the arena." There was a wistfulness about his voice that reminded Zagreus very much of how Patroclus had once sounded before his reunion with Achilles. "I am Automedon, formerly of Phthia."

"The pleasure's mine, sir. Especially if that means you can help me find my way. I need to get back to the Lethe, and from there I will be fine."

"Stay a while," Automedon entreated him, indicating that Zagreus might sit on the bench beside him. It was made of stone but covered in cushions, and big enough for three people to occupy.

Zagreus did not sit down very often, unless he was fishing or otherwise occupied with something, but he could not turn down the invitation. He left his feet hanging over the side of the bench in case he might get ash or grass stains on the cushions. "Thank you for the invitation to join you," he said. "You said you are from Phthia? I know some people who also resided there."

He gave a slow nod. Zagreus wondered if he had been in Achilles' group during the war, or if he was too old for such things and stayed behind, like Zagreus had learned Peleus had done. (Peleus liked to say that if he *had* joined the campaign, if not for his damn leg, he would have sat down with Priam, come to terms, and ended the war in five minutes flat.)

Automedon was quiet for a long time and then shook his head as if waking himself. "Forgive me for my lack of response, I get lost in myself sometimes. Memories of home tend to have that effect." He sighed, listing back against the pillows. He was a less formed shade, almost transparent, although there was some life in him.

"I may be able to help," Zagreus said. He'd been trying this with the shades at the house, and it had caused quite a clamor in his father's hall. The newly departed were not yet themselves, true shades of a person. Zagreus could extend a little of the power that ran in his blood, and bring back some of that life, which would normally only return to them after they had long since integrated into the Underworld.

"How so?" Automedon asked, head lifted, curiosity piqued. His voice echoed and sounded far away. He truly was newly dead, and the memories of his life had faded him even more. The most solid part about him was the cloak he wore, long as if it had been made for someone taller than him, and all dark colors, patched carefully because it would have been in tatters otherwise.

"Give me your hand?" Zagreus asked, offering his own.

Automedon placed his hand in Zagreus'. His palm was see-through, his fingertips fading completely into the air. It must have been hard for him to interact with the world around him, his sense of touch diminished. Zagreus would bet that beneath his robes, his legs and feet were the same, if not in a worse state.

"Here, then," Zagreus said, placing both his hands over Automedon's, and then leaning their foreheads together. The more points of contact he had, the better this worked.

The energy he shared felt like the Styx flowing through him, the river and his blood becoming one. As it passed into Automedon's form, it was at first a slow trickle and then a pour of energy from Zagreus to the shade.

He closed his eyes to concentrate but when he opened them, Automedon was looking immediately more vital, his hands whole and his body opaque enough that Zagreus couldn't see the pattern on the cushions through him. He even looked younger, which could sometimes happen with those who had died of old age. His hair was no longer fully gray, it had gained streaks of a cool-toned brown, and instead of hanging limp from his head it had more of a curl, fluffing up around his shoulders. His eyes were brighter, the lines and dark circles beneath them faded.

His brow had not smoothed and his skin was still spotted with age and sun damage, but the wrinkles down his neck had lessened, and Zagreus thought he could see more muscle tone through his arms. He looked like he'd done some kind of job that had worked them while he was alive, especially his forearms, which were layered with wiry muscle. His beard was neater, and not quite so shaggy, brown speckled with grays instead of all silver, and his smile was sweet.

He was *handsome*. Zagreus hoped he was not also the father of someone Zag was sleeping with.

"How do you feel?" he asked. His forehead was still pressed against Automedon's, and when he drew away there were a few of his laurel leaves in Automedon's hair and the folds of his clothes. That was a pretty common side effect of Zagreus' power.

"I feel wonderful, dear," he said, cupping Zagreus' cheek with one hand. "Thank you."

He drew Zagreus in and pressed a kiss to his forehead, and Zagreus couldn't help but feel enchanted. "Of course, anytime," he said. "Soon enough, I imagine you'll have enough energy to appear whatever age you like. Although, you would look fine exactly like this. It suits you."

Automedon laughed at his babbling, turned over his shoulder and called out to another shade who was coming out of a nearby house. "Antilochus, come here. This one says old age suits me, although he has me looking better than I have in years!"

"Truly? That's because he hasn't seen you young—oh my, you do look better."

The shade who joined them was a mountain of a man, although Zagreus had met mortals with larger stature (Sisyphus and that guy Ajax in specific). Although he was on a much bigger scale, he had the same muscular definition that Automedon did in his arms. His long hair was tied back as if he'd needed it out of the way, and he wore his chiton simply tied around his waist, which let Zagreus look at a whole lot of bare torso, equally muscular. Wow.

"Don't I?" Automedon squeezed Zagreus' shoulder. "Antilochus never had the privilege of growing old," he said. This was clearly true, Antilochus looked a bit younger than Zagreus, and usually shades didn't revert too many years from the age at which they died; it didn't feel right for them.

"It doesn't bother me." Antilochus' smile was a bit sad anyway—clearly he was bothered by the fact that this upset Automedon.

The bench was big enough for three, but not if one of the three was built like Antilochus. He sat on the grass instead, leaning in and resting his folded arms on Automedon's lap. Automedon stroked his hair, playing with the little braids woven into it, running his thumbnail down the center of each one.

"You're the prince, aren't you? Zagreus?" Antilochus asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Antilochus, son of Nestor," he introduced himself, although Automedon had already said his name. "They say you are the person to go to you if you want to be reunited with those you care about."

"I like to help people with that," Zagreus said. "I'll do whatever I can!"

"Thank you, although you need not do anything without a fair exchange. Whatever we may offer you, we are willing." Antilochus made a frustrated little noise. "I thought it would be easier to find them. My bones are buried with theirs, it ought not to be such a mess."

"Bureaucracy gets messy," Zagreus said. "Often such things aren't enough if there are extenuating circumstances. May I have the names of your... um?"

"Our lovers," Automedon confirmed. "Achilles, son of Thetis, prince of Phthia, and Patroclus of Opus."

Zagreus' jaw dropped. "What? Really?"

"So you have heard of them," Antilochus said with a wry smile. "Notable names, I know, but I promise we are not lying. Automedon was Achilles' charioteer. I was not a myrmidon, myself, but as I said, I was buried alongside them. I died in the war, after Patroclus and before Achilles. I don't know how I've never found them in all these years."

"He found me sooner, and I died an old man," Automedon sighed. "If you can believe it, Zagreus, I am only four years older than him, and I've got hardly a year or so on Achilles and Patroclus." He patted Antilochus' head. "Do you have any clue where they are?"

"Yes, I do! There were... well, complications with their placement in Elysium," Zagreus said. He did not give the full story, feeling that it was for Achilles and Patroclus to tell or keep quiet as they wished. "But I know precisely where they are. I am, um, I'm very close with them." He wasn't sure whether this was also for them to tell or keep quiet as they wished.

He did not exactly get the chance to decide this. Automedon and Antilochus looked at one another and burst into laughter.

"Of *course* they fell for the prince of the whole damn place," Antilochus said.

"Gods, you are their type, aren't you?" Automedon added.

"Looks like you, back then, a little bit. Right, Automedon? Tiny little thing."

"Hey!" Zagreus said, affronted.

"No offense," Antilochus tacked on.

"I suppose I can't really take any." Compared to Antilochus, he was indeed tiny. "But yes, sirs, they moved into a house recently. I can describe it to you, if it helps. I would offer to take you there, but I don't think they're home at present."

"Thank you, Zagreus, this is a massive help," Automedon said. Antilochus didn't seem to quite have the words for it, he just swept Zagreus up into a crushing embrace that nearly pulled him off the bench.

Zagreus hugged him back, patting him on the shoulder. Gods, he was strong. "Anytime," he choked out.

"You're crushing the poor dear, put him down," Automedon said.

"Right. Sorry." Antilochus released him, and Zagreus squeezed his shoulder to let him know it was okay.

"Go back in there and get me a pen, I want to write down the instructions to find them," Automedon told him, and Antilochus went right away, but not without snatching a kiss from him and another hug from Zagreus.

"You know, Zagreus," Automedon said, while Antilochus rushed into the house, "after we find ourselves reunited with them... I wouldn't mind seeing you between the two of them."

This sent Zagreus into incoherent spluttering until Antilochus arrived again.

The woman Zagreus had seen with Patroclus was near the bakery again, looking over what appeared to be a list of things she needed from the market. That was a brilliant idea. Zagreus ought to start doing that.

She caught him staring and gave him a curious look with a tilt of her head. Today, her hair was swept up with a scarf and many little strings of pearls, and her make-up included particularly dark lines around her eyes, which made the blue stand out more.

She was standing beside an enormous box that must have contained all she'd purchased at the market, along with a bag that sat atop it.

"Hello, miss," Zagreus said, "may I help you carry that? I know that most shades of Elysium aren't bothered by such a weight but it seems quite bulky for one person alone."

"Oh, well, certainly," she said. She had such a soft voice, she was almost difficult to hear.

"I don't mean to intrude, if you were waiting on somebody," Zagreus said. "I just... well, I've seen you a few times now, and I wanted to properly introduce myself."

"You need no introduction," she said. "Your feet and your laurels speak for themselves, you are Zagreus, are you not?"

"I am! I suppose I'm easy to recognize." He lifted the box for her, and let her direct him, because he could hardly see around it. It wasn't too heavy, but with his vision lessened by its bulk, they made slow progress through the crowd. "If you'd rather not give me your name, that's perfectly fine," he said, having learned from Patroclus.

"Oh, that's no trouble. You can call me Pyrrha."

"Thank you, It's nice to actually meet you. Where are you originally from, Pyrrha? On the surface, that is," Zagreus said, accustomed to hearing shades give their hometown along with their name.

"Skyros," she said. It was a place Zagreus had never heard of. "Although I did not stay there long. The palace there was lovely, right on the sea."

"It sounds beautiful," Zagreus said honestly, having experienced firsthand the loveliness of the seaside.

"It was, I—oh, I need to stop here," Pyrrha said, and they set down their burdens for a moment in front of a shop that sold all sorts of little trinkets and ornaments, which Zagreus did not often enter for fear of breaking something. He shrugged his pauldron off before going in and held his hands behind his back just to be sure he wouldn't bump into something.

She moved around the place like she knew it well, greeting the shopkeeper and looking at a particular tray of beads and baubles. They looked sort of like the ones Patroclus wore in his hair, tying them into braids when he had them.

"Which ones do you like?" Zagreus asked Pyrrha. She was sorting through the tray with concentration that said she was looking for something in particular.

"They're not for me, they're a gift," she said, continuing to search. Zagreus noted her setting aside gold beads, and wondered if she might be looking for Patroclus. He thought Achilles gave Pat most of the jewelry he wore, but maybe some of it was from Pyrrha, too. "I apologize for my standoffishness, Zagreus, I'm just a little..."

"I understand," Zagreus said, finally allowing himself to touch what he was looking at, enjoying the different textures of the engravings on the jewelry the shop stocked. "You're a bit shy around new people, right?"

She laughed a little, soft and muffled behind her hand. "You could say that, I suppose."

"I'm not sure if you've seen him around Elysium, but Thanatos is like that as well," Zagreus said. "He and I have been very close since we were young."

"At least there's that, I would hate to have offended." She didn't look at him when she spoke, but she sounded genuine.

Among all the trinkets in the shop, it was difficult to spot any single ornament, all of it sort of blending into a stream of color and shine. Zagreus' attention was only drawn by the contrast—a hint of red and orange among the blue and green.

The adornment had a little ring where it could be wound into your hair or strung on a necklace, with a series of tiny leaves dangling from it, painted red, orange, and gold. It resembled Zagreus' laurel a little, although the tones of the colors weren't quite the same.

Pyrrha looked over her shoulder, noticing him examining it, clear interest in her face.

"This is the sort of thing you were looking for?" Zagreus suggested.

"Well, yes. He likes red," she explained, letting him drop the accessory into her palm. She was wearing a lot of rings, but it didn't disguise the calluses on her hands. He wondered whether it was rude to ask if she got them training with a sword, and if so, whether she'd spar with him.

"Too much green and blue everywhere up here?" Zagreus suggested, which was something he'd heard Patroclus say before.

"I suppose," Pyrrha replied breezily, which did not at all confirm whether she was talking about Patroclus. "Do you mind—were you planning to purchase this?"

"Oh, no, it's yours," Zagreus said, holding his hands behind his back again so that she could not try to give it back to him.

"Then I'll take it. Thank you." She put her hands over her mouth again as she smiled. Zagreus thought it was a bit of a strange mannerism, but maybe it was just social awkwardness, the sort of thing Dusa might do if she had hands. What a strange girl. Zagreus found himself charmed by it.

For a while, he wondered if she was going to go straight to Patroclus with the gift itself, although their path deviated quickly enough that Zagreus' initial guess was deterred.

They came upon a large home, at the very foundations of Elysium, so low down you could feel the heat rising off the Phlegethon below. It was massive like the House of Hades and it was just as bustling, although there was one distinct difference Zagreus picked out just after entering.

All of the shades around here were women.

It was Zagreus' understanding that there weren't many women in Elysium but perhaps that was the sort of talk that came from people who placed men above women no matter the circumstances. There were plenty of girls here, all different ages, and most of them greeted Pyrrha as she passed, many staring at Zagreus as well. He would have waved, if his hands were free, but he needed both for his cargo, so he settled for friendly nods.

The house was a confusion of twists and turns, and Zagreus had to stay close to Pyrrha so he wouldn't get lost, much as he wanted to explore. She led him to a large atrium, where she instructed him to set the box on a long table. This room, too, was populated, mostly older women seated at various tables sharing wine or nectar.

There was a curtain at the other end of the room, and from behind it emerged a woman dressed lavishly, in the sort of magnificent gown that Zagreus had only ever seen on Nyx or his mother. Although much more elaborate, her dress was in a similar style to Pyrrha's, cut to bare her breasts, which was much more obvious on her than on Pyrrha's slim frame.

"Pyrrha!" she squealed, giving a girlish giggle even though she seemed around Persephone's age (or the age Persephone appeared, rather). She was cute, short and curvy, with auburn hair that she wore strung with pearls and warm brown skin and dark eyes. She embraced Pyrrha upon seeing her, kissing her on her nose because it was the only part of her face that was not painted. It did leave a smudge of the woman's lipstick on Pyrrha's nose, which wrinkled cutely as she realized the mark had been left there and smudged it off. "Who's your friend?"

"Dei, this is Zareus," Pyrrha said, resting a hand softly on Zagreus' shoulder as she introduced him. He wasn't sure why it thrilled him so much, like there was something about her which pulled him to her.

"Oh?" she tilted her head curiously, a smile on her full lips. "And how is it that you know Zagreus?"

"We met in the market," Zagreus explained, and Pyrrha nodded, giving his shoulder a quick squeeze before letting her hand drop.

"Zagreus, this is Deidamia, former queen of Skyros and my wife."

Deidamia gave a little flourish of her hand to greet him.

"It's a pleasure! To be quite honest, I didn't realize mortals allowed two women to marry," Zagreus said. They both laughed, which made him shut his mouth, afraid he'd stepped in it again, or else revealed exactly how little he understood about the surface.

"They do if you're Pyrrha," Deidamia said, in a way that sounded like an in-joke. Both of them tittered with laughter again. "And only Pyrrha could do the errand-running and convince the prince of the Underworld to courier her parcels back."

"I don't mind it, I swear!" Zagreus said. "I like to help and I like to explore more places around here, so it was a doubly enjoyable morning or afternoon, my lady."

"Isn't he polite!" Deidamia remarked, clapping her hands together. Her voice reminded him a little bit of Aphrodite in its bubblyness but without the lustful undertones. She may have been convinced Pyrrha could convince anyone to do something for her but Zagreus would have trouble saying no to literally anything Deidamia asked of him, too. "Come now, Zagreus, we can't go sending you back out there without something to eat or drink. Relax for a while, yes?" She turned and walked as if she expected him to follow and he found that he was correct, he could not tell her no.

That was how Zagreus ended up sitting in a smaller, circular room with wide windows overlooking the edges of Elysium, with a glass of nectar and a young lady on either side of him, probing him with questions about the House and, more importantly, about Persephone. Everyone was curious about the return of the Underworld's erstwhile queen.

"They say Achilles lives at the House of Hades," one of the girls said, to which her companion reached across Zagreus and batted her chidingly on the arm. "What?" she asked, in mock offense. "I'm simply relaying what I've heard!"

"He works there," Zagreus explained, "but he lives in Elysium."

"Are you and he well acquainted?" she asked, leaning on his shoulder but stealing glances over at Pyrrha and Deidamia, who sat on the other side of a low table, reclined against one another, Deidamia firmly installed in Pyrrha's lap.

"Yes, actually," Zagreus said. "My father employed him to train me, but that isn't part of his duty any longer. We're very close, I... he... Sometimes I think he's the only reason I didn't turn out a complete mess. I was angry and bitter in my early adulthood. My father was awful to me and I resented it. But Achilles was only ever kind."

"So much for the legendary wrath," said the girl on Zagreus' right, taking a sip of her drink.

"I've heard much about that," Zagreus said, looking into his glass, which he turned in his hands. "But I think he had plenty of right to be angry. And that is not the person he is today. Besides, I know Patroclus well, too, and I also think I would be violently angry if anyone tried to take him from me permanently."

He looked up, and found that he had Deidamia and Pyrrha's attention, and that Deidamia was smiling while Pyrrha looked a little misty and almost concerned. He wondered if she had known Patroclus in life, too.

"You do seem quite close to them," said the girl who had first brought up the topic.

"I love them both," Zagreus said, to a chorus of *awwws* from the ladies.

"I didn't realize gods were interested in shades in such a way," Deidamia said, which made Pyrrha give an exasperated sigh for some reason.

"I don't think most are, but I am," Zagreus said. "I mean, shades are just people, right? They have the same souls. I've come to know a lot of shades, recently, but, um. I don't think I'll ever love any of them as much as Achilles and Patroclus."

"You're sweet, Zagreus," Deidamia said, "I approve."

"Thank you?" Zagreus honestly had not realized he required her approval, but he was glad to have it, in any case.

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Achilles and Patroclus had not held an official house-warming, because they didn't initially intend to, but Peleus talked them into it. Zagreus was happy to attend, and had even gotten them something he was quite excited about from the house contractor: a painting of the island which had been their childhood home. Phoenix had already confirmed it was quite accurate. It was also beautiful, the seaside painted in shades of soft blue-green.

Achilles and Pat's home had been more populated as of late, their other estranged lovers having found them thanks to Zagreus' efforts and their family dropping by from time to time. Today, though, it was simply full to bursting, with most of the partygoers spilling out into the garden because the house simply couldn't hold that many people. It took Zagreus a long time to even find Pat, much less Achilles.

Zagreus was not surprised to see a number of the shades he'd recently met in attendance, along with several new faces. Automedon, Phoenix, and Peleus were all indoors, along with Antilochus' father, who was the most elderly person Zagreus thought he'd ever met and who would not stop

talking about his glory days for a second. *"You just have to back away slowly and then he'll forget he's talking to you,"* Antilochus said. *"Leave him to the other old men, that's it—yes, Automedon, I'm calling you old."*

Antilochus himself was spending most of his time in the garden with Patroclus and Ajax (Achilles' cousin, apparently) and their conversation devolved into recounting all the stupid things Achilles had done because he was virtually invulnerable and it made him an idiot. Zagreus was surprised at first but when he considered it, the stories did make sense with the picture of Achilles he'd come to know.

Sarpedon only dropped by briefly but noted that he wanted to try some of said stunts now that they were already dead. Especially the one about pole-vaulting with his spear.

Zagreus met the former king and queen of Ithaka, who were very sweet if a bit long-winded. As it turned out they had not actually been invited, but Penelope was charming enough to get them through the door even if Achilles and Pat reportedly disliked Odysseus. Zag was also introduced to Achilles' nephew (he hadn't known Achilles *had* a nephew) and several other myrmidon commanders, and was treated to some anecdotes about Pat that he was going to *have* to ask his uncle Poseidon about.

He wanted to look to Achilles for confirmation on the truth of these, but when he glanced around, he couldn't catch sight of him, and assumed he had probably been embroiled in a lengthy conversation with Nestor and/or had tried the pole-vaulting thing with Sarpedon.

Several usual fixtures of the Underworld came around: Hermes darting through with a gift from him and Charon, Hypnos floating by on the way to his usual Elysium business, Thanatos poofing in and then out once he became overwhelmed and had to go back to work. Zagreus was the only one of these who seemed to stay longer than what was polite and obligatory.

Deidamia arrived late because she, quote, 'wanted to make an entrance,' and she certainly delivered on that. The women who lived in her house were all quite skilled in music and dancing, especially Pyrrha, who played the lyre and had a lovely voice, low and warm. Everybody left the house to watch

them perform, and to Zagreus' surprise, following the performance, several of the myrmidons greeted Pyrrha with hugs and laughter and jokes that really weren't polite to say to a lady like her.

There was one notable face missing from the partygoers, and although Zagreus had once been assuming he just kept managing to miss him, he was now certain this was not true. Achilles was not among the crowd, despite being one of the guests of honor.

"Are you looking for somebody?" Deidamia asked him, having managed to sneak up on him while he was scanning the collected group.

"Oh, just Achilles. I haven't seen him all day-or-night, actually," Zagreus said, with a little frown.

Off to the side, Patroclus was greeting Pyrrha with a kiss on the side of her head, so as not to smudge any of her makeup. She was nearly of a height with him.

"Haven't you?" Deidamia asked.

"Unless he's become invisible, no." In the distance, a glass broke, and several people cheered wildly.

Deidamia sighed and shook her head. "Pyrrha!" she called. "Come now, love, you can't keep your little prince in the dark any longer. I feel bad, look at him, he's like a sad puppy." She held Zagreus' face, turning him toward Pyrrha as if to demonstrate. Zagreus thought he mostly just looked confused.

Pyrrha laughed, continuing to cover her mouth. "Zagreus," she said, stepping closer to him. "You truly have not noticed?" She lifted his chin with her fingertips and Zagreus felt a rush of heat, like when Achilles did the same right before he kissed him.

She smiled, and he could see an extra sharpness to her teeth, a nymph's smile. It was hard to discern the shape of her eyes beyond the makeup she wore, and the same went for her lips, but...

Zagreus took her hand. Sword calluses, the same ones that had guided his hands and taught him to fight all those years ago. "Oh, gods. I've been a bit of an idiot, haven't I?"

"Not entirely," said Pyrrha—Achilles? "We've been having a bit of fun with you, and you can't be blamed for not recognizing deception. Dei and Pat are very sneaky."

"Shades can take on any appearance they had in life, so I suppose... this is how you appeared in life once?" It was like realizing that Achilles and Peleus resembled one another after already understanding that they were related. He wondered if this was why Pyrrha always covered her mouth when she smiled or laughed, in case Zagreus recognized the shape of her smile.

"Yes, you are correct."

Odysseus clapped Zagreus on the shoulder. "No shame in it, they fooled me just as well."

"I wish I had fooled you better, old man." In a flash of light, Achilles reverted to his customary appearance, sans armor because this was a casual gathering, shaking out his now-unbound hair. Zagreus could see more distinction between the two now that he could compare them—Pyrrha must have been Achilles on the cusp of manhood, and now he was broader and more defined, his face a more angular shape, not quite as slim and willowy after years of combat.

"To be completely honest, I thought you had it figured out when we went shopping for Pat," Achilles said.

"I... sort of thought Pat might just have a lover who resembled you," Zagreus said, giving an embarrassed chuckle now that he considered how silly that line of reasoning was.

"Mystery solved then, Zagreus?" Patroclus asked, putting an arm around Achilles' shoulders and kissing him on the cheek this time, now that his face

was not painted. Zagreus bet that if he'd ever seen Pyrrha bare-faced, he would have made the connection much more easily.

"Yes, it has been." Zagreus shook his head, leaning into Achilles' other side. "No thanks to you."

"I dress that way when I don't want to get stopped by every random shade who knows the name of Achilles, because only my close friends and family recognize me," he explained. "That's what I was doing whenever I encountered you—when first I saw you it was just nerves that kept me from telling you who I was. I came straight home to Pat instead, and he proposed that we keep up the charade."

"Hence why there was already dessert at your place," Zagreus surmised. He remembered Patroclus wiping a smudge of red paint off Achilles' cheek.

"You're getting it," Patroclus said.

"Zagreus." Achilles drew him closer, unwinding an arm from around Patroclus so that he could hold Zagreus around the waist and cup his face at the same time. "My dear. While I am sorry for tricking you, I do want to say that I so appreciate learning the man you are when you are around people with whom you're not already acquainted. Of course I suspected this but it feels good to confirm that you are just as gentle and kind-hearted as I have come to know you."

Zagreus felt like someone had taken his heart and squeezed, the rush of emotion making him embrace Achilles tightly and hide his face in his shoulder to keep anyone from noticing that he might have become a little misty-eyed. He mumbled into Achilles' shoulder, but the cadence and tone of his words was enough for Achilles to understand.

"I love you, too."

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The housewarming was over and the partygoers had dwindled to six in total: the guests of honor, of course, along with Zagreus, Automedon,

Antilochus, and Deidamia.

Antilochus had been the one who made the executive decision to relocate themselves to the bedroom, because they certainly couldn't all fit on the couches, and while Achilles and Pat's nest-like bedroom was cozy and quite large, Zagreus thought perhaps they had reached the limit of the number of people it could occupy.

"I want to paint your face sometime," Deidamia was telling him. She was sprawled across his lap and Pat's both, and Achilles, in turn, was laying with his head on her stomach, one arm around her waist. She had Zagreus' face in her hands, and he couldn't nudge her fingers away because Antilochus was wedged too tightly against Zagreus' side for him to free his hand.

"You don't think I would look silly?" Zagreus asked.

"On the contrary, I think you would look very pretty."

"Are you quite certain my features are not too angular and masculine for such things?" He tilted his head to show off the cut of his jaw.

"I do not! You're very pretty, and you don't even wear a beard."

"Antilochus doesn't wear a beard either." Zagreus pointed out.

"Antilochus is too tall for me to paint him, it would make my arms tire."

From his place curled up on Antilochus' chest, Automedon laughed. He looked very dignified for somebody who was cuddling, although every time Zagreus saw him, he looked younger and younger, his hair fuller and more brown, his face less lined. He was still handsome as anything.

"If Automedon ever goes back to looking the way he did when he was in his twenties, you should paint him. He was as pretty as a girl," Antilochus said.

"Prettier than most girls," Automedon corrected him.

"Prettier than Pyrrha, certainly," Achilles mumbled, but one wondered whether his opinion was clouded by affection.

"I think he's quite lovely as is," Patroclus chimed in. Zagreus thought he'd been asleep.

"You like older men," Achilles said, which was somewhat of a revelation to Zagreus but appeared to be a universally understood fact to the rest of the room.

"I also like younger men. And men my own age. And all sorts of women," Patroclus noted.

"And gods," Deidamia said, which prompted various snickering. Patroclus pinched her thigh and she yelped, disturbing Achilles, who only held her tighter, his fingers digging into the fabric of her dress as he grumbled wordless complaints.

Once they settled, Zagreus thought to ask, "are the two of you really married?"

"Yes," both of them chorused.

"Didn't stop Agamemnon from trying to marry Achilles off to one of his daughters on *multiple occasions*," Antilochus scoffed.

"Nobody told him I was married somehow," Achilles said.

"And yet he knew about your son," Automedon remarked, which sent Zagreus into a whole different spiral of questions and confusion.

"I am going to need several explanations," Zagreus said, just to put that out there.

"It's alright, you'll get the whole story eventually," Patroclus said, giving him a placating kiss on the side of his head.

"It may take several years, it seems," Zagreus replied.

"Probably," Pat agreed.

"I think I'm alright with that," Zagreus said, snuggling into his shoulder. "I like getting to know the people you were in life, the people you cared about and who care about you."

"We like getting to know you, too," Deidamia said, patting Zagreus' cheek. "The boys have good taste. Obviously."

"Quite clearly, my lady!" Zagreus enthused, because Deidamia was one of those who did enjoy Zagreus referring to them by a formal title.

"Good. Because we're keeping you," Deidamia said.

Antilochus made a rumbling noise of agreement.

"You can't keep him," Achilles said, smacking Antilochus' thigh. He didn't bother to tell Deidamia off, probably because telling Deidamia off seemed to be mostly impossible.

"They can keep me," Zagreus said, very content with being squished between several people. This was the sort of thing that didn't normally happen in the Underworld. If he wanted to be cuddled this much, he'd have to snuggle with Cerberus, and then he'd end up with a lot of dog hair on his person and his father yelling at him for usurping the hound of hell's time. "I like being kept."

"See, he likes it," Automedon said, reaching out to pat Zagreus' chest.

"You should at least rearrange yourselves," Pat noted. "Zagreus is going to want to get up at some point, he can't lie still for that long."

"Usually I just start wiggling around until somebody notices," Zagreus agreed.

"Switch with Achilles, then, we all drank too much to contend with your wiggling in a few hours," Deidamia said diplomatically.

"Can shades get hungover?" Antilochus mumbled. "Seems wrong."

Their new positioning meant Deidamia was playing with Zagreus' hair (and his laurel). She had long fingernails like Meg, and her stroking his head made his scalp all tingly. It was nice. The change in seating arrangement also meant Achilles was kissing Antilochus—slow, indulgent passes of lips against lips, enough time between to hold up some semblance of a conversation but never pulling far enough away from one another that it felt like they *stopped* kissing.

When Zagreus didn't have his eyes closed because Deidamia was lulling him into a state of at least half-asleep, he was watching them exchange kisses. If he were to place a bet, he'd say he was gonna fall asleep before they stopped. Patroclus was dozing against Achilles' shoulder, although he was still at least somewhat awake, because his hand occasionally moved to stroke up and down Dei's thigh. Automedon was actually asleep, snuggled up with one of Antilochus' broad arms around his shoulders.

"Sleep, little prince," Deidamia told him, so quiet he doubted even any of the others even heard her. "We'll all be here for you when you wake."

"Yeah, okay," he said, shutting his eyes, her fingers in his hair again, the pleasant buzzy feeling sending him to sleep faster than he'd ever managed it before.

When he woke, they were there. He'd been so dead asleep he'd been moved without his knowledge, and he was in Patroclus' arms, being cuddled in the same sort of way Thanatos used to wrap his entire body around Mort when they were children. Automedon was the only other one still in the bed, sitting up against several pillows and reading a book Zagreus had brought Achilles and Pat once. He could hear Achilles, Deidamia, and Antilochus bickering from the kitchen.

Automedon and Patroclus were talking, but Zagreus was so blurred with sleep that he couldn't totally comprehend what they said to one another. He could feel the rumble of Pat's chest as he spoke, and was relaxed enough that he almost could have drifted off again.

He was stirred further into wakefulness by the kiss Patroclus placed on his cheek, just over the arch of his cheekbone. "Good morning," he said,

despite having no idea what time of day it was.

"Good morning," Zagreus replied, because it seemed to be the thing to do. He stretched, and felt Patroclus' warm palm caress down his front, feeling the pull of his muscle. "I don't think I've ever slept in Elysium before."

"You've been enjoying the comforts of Elysium more and more of late, haven't you?" Patroclus asked.

"I really have."

Author's Note:

Notes about who everyone is (based on my limited Iliad Knowledges and possibly wrong but definitely ridiculous because why explain something in a way that's not ridiculous?)

Shades Zag meets:

1. Sarpedon - dude from Lycia who got wrapped up in the Trojan War because he happened to be hanging at Priam's house. He was pretty chill about the fact that he was likely going to his doom, has a whole speech about it and everything, so I imagine he'd be fine with the fact that Patroclus killed him. Also he was the first one to recognize that Patroclus wasn't Achilles! And yeah, he's Zeus' kid but we don't hold that against him.
2. Peleus - Achilles' dad. Not actually sure why he wasn't at Troy (couldn't have been bc he was old because Nestor's there) so I went with the fanon injury thing. He is also half-nymph so Achilles is actually 3/4 nymph.
3. Phoenix - Basically Achilles' other dad. He gives a long lecture about how Achilles needs to listen to him because when Achilles was a baby he wouldn't eat unless Phoenix fed him so now he has to listen to what Phoenix says. Phoenix had a real shit home situation and escaped from his father to seek refuge in Phthia and Peleus cared for him there and it all sounds pretty gay to me.
4. Automedon - Achilles' charioteer and one of the few who survive the war (that's why he's old) because when Automedon goes on a crazy

murder rampage after Patroclus dies, Achilles' horses yoink him out of the battle. He is especially close with Patroclus, as demonstrated by the murder rampage thing. Also they're described as being 'of the same mind'.

5. Antilochus - often referred to as the youngest of the Greeks. This isn't in the Iliad but some other legends say he was Achilles and Pat's lover and is buried with them. Obviously that's the gayest version so I went with that. He did die after Pat & before Achilles. He's an absolute mad lad while driving a chariot and runs Menelaus off the road during a friendly race.

6. Deidamia - Achilles' wife and the mother of his son. There's not much detail about her but I for one cannot stand *certain authors of certain YA novels about Achilles* making her out to be a horrible person and an impediment to Achilles and Patroclus. Let them be poly!

7. Pyrrha - Achilles' fake name when he was hiding out as a lady in Skyros. Means 'fire' and was probably used because he had light-colored hair. So who knows, Achilles could've been a ginger.

Other Shit:

1. At the party, Zag meets Nestor, whose entire role in the Iliad is to give long speeches about how goddamn old he is. Ok fine and maybe to contrast Achilles' survival-centered viewpoints with a 'glory above all' mentality. but mostly he just talks about being old.

2. Agamemnon really did try to marry Achilles to his daughter Iphigenia (that one was actually a ruse and ended her being sacrificed to or possibly just scooped up by Artemis) and then also mentions other nameless daughters when he's trying to entice Achilles back into joining the army, as if being Agamemnon's son in law would be a great reward.

3. I'm sticking ladies in Elysium because fuck the patriarchy.

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